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ABSTRACT

Selected findings are presented from the National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) program, a survey of both inmates in state and federal prisons, and the National Crime Survey (NCS), a survey of victims of crime. Certain conventional beliefs or myths about the nature of crime in the United States are challenged by providing the statistical realities. The findings deal with issues of contemporary interest such as criminals' behavior and characteristics, national crime trends, types of crimes, public attitudes toward police performance, and victims' attitudes. Charts and/or graphs accompany each myth and reality to visually complement the statistical information. (Author/HLM)

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Myths and Realities about Crime

CG 013154

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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A nontechnical presentation of selected information from the National Prisoner Statistics program and the National Crime Survey

U.S. Department of Justice

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Acknowledgments

The National Prisoner Statistics program and the National Crime Survey could not operate without the cooperation of literally thousands of individuals across the Nation who voluntarily devote time and effort to complete forms or grant interviews. For both programs, the Bureau of the Census acts as data collection agent for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Numerous persons in each agency were responsible in recent years for implementing the programs that yielded the information presented in this report. Their names are listed in published reports in the NPS and NCS series.

The impetus for the development of this nontechnical presentation arose from a desire to give the public a more general overview of crime and

criminals than is furnished in published NPS and NCS reports. LEAA's Statistics Division administers both programs under the supervision of Charles R. Kindermann, assisted by Patsy A. Klaus and Carol B. Kalish. The gathering and processing of data in the Bureau of the Census were under the general supervision of either Marvin M. Thompson, Demographic Surveys Division, assisted by Linda R. Murphy and Carolyn Y. Thompson, or of Caesar G. Hill, Business Division, aided by Chester E. Bowie. The report was prepared in the Bureau's Crime Statistics Analysis Office, under the general supervision of Adolfo L. Paez. A technical review of the report was performed in a unit headed by Dennis J. Schwanz, Statistical Methods Division.

"Crime cannot be measured directly. Its amount must be inferred from the frequency of some occurrence connected with it, for example, crimes brought to the attention of police; persons arrested; prosecutions; convictions and other dispositions, such as probation or commitment. Each of these may be used as an index of the amount of crime. In general, the sensitiveness of these indexes is in the order in which they are given above."

**President Herbert Hoover's
Research Committee
on Social Trends, 1933**

Preface

While remaining strong, the traditional dependence on administrative records as sources of statistics on crime has been diminished during the past decade through the installation of data collection and analysis systems that are bringing a higher order of *sensitiveness* to crime accounting and, perhaps more importantly, a greater insight into the burden placed on American society by the perpetrators and victims of crime. The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 authorized the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to develop and maintain a criminal justice statistics program. Since that time, LEAA has initiated a number of new statistical systems, as well as reinforced certain existing ones, covering numerous aspects of criminal justice. This publication deals with information from two statistical systems, one old but periodically modified, the other new and in a preliminary stage of development with respect both to methodological issues and the interpretation of results.

The older of the two systems — the National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) program — was instituted a half century ago for the purpose of gathering and disseminating information on State and Federal correctional institutions. Two elements of the NPS are represented in this publication: the Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, which was conducted in 1974, and Capital Punishment, an annual census of prisoners under sentence of death throughout the United States.

The second system — the National Crime Survey (NCS) — was established early in the 1970's. While sharing the inability of other programs to measure all criminal offenses, the NCS relies upon uniquely qualified sources — the victims of crime — for particulars on selected classes of crime. Based on a continuous representative sample of about 60,000 households and 14,000 businesses per year, the NCS victimization surveys since 1973 have yielded annual information on the impact and characteristics of the following crimes, whether completed or attempted: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Combined, the first three offenses are categorized as "personal crimes of violence," or as "violent crimes," in this and other publications dealing with NCS results. It must be pointed out, however, that the NCS does not measure other violent offenses, namely homicide and kidnapping; therefore, findings presented here concerning violence should not be construed to apply to all forms of violent crime. Supplementary surveys conducted under the NCS program in 26 large cities during 1974 and 1975 provided certain public opinion data used in this report.

LEAA administers the NPS and NCS programs. The collection and processing of data are performed by the Bureau of the Census.

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This publication is designed to acquaint the general public with selected findings from the NPS and NCS programs. The coverage is limited to subjects of contemporary interest and to results that would appear to challenge certain "conventional beliefs" about the nature of crime in the United States. It is recognized, however, that individuals may well reject the implication that some (or all) of the propositions set forth are indeed **myths**. By limiting the supporting evidence to selected NPS and NCS data, moreover, it is also conceded that data from other systems, based on differing coverages and methodologies, may possibly dispute what is suggested here to constitute **reality**.

Addressed to a broad audience, **Myths and Realities about Crime** differs in several respects from other reports officially published under the NPS and NCS programs. The publication's technical content has been kept to a minimum. Descriptions of the complex data gathering and processing methods intrinsic to major statistical systems have not been included. Analytical guidelines and definitions of terms are absent too. Moreover, except for the

item dealing with capital punishment (which happens to be the only one based on data from administrative records), the statistical data presented in this report are estimates derived from surveys in which the respondents participated voluntarily. Because these data are not the products of complete enumerations, they are subject to sampling variability; and, as is true for data from virtually any collection effort, the data are subject to nonsampling errors. Although the report does not elaborate about these and other constraints inherent to survey data, all statements of comparison based on such data have been tested for statistical significance at a minimum level of 1.6 standard errors. In other words, the chances are at least 90 out of 100 that the differences described did not result solely from sampling variability. In fact, the vast majority of comparative statements passed at two standard errors, or the 95 percent confidence level.

As indicated, **Myths and Realities** presents only selected information from two major statistical systems. For many of the 23 subjects covered, the respective systems have yielded a

Introduction

wealth of additional data. They have also addressed numerous other topics pertaining to victims and offenders. Comprehensive coverage of these results, together with definitions and documentation of technical and methodological matters, can be found in an ongoing series of reports, some of which are listed in the annotated bibliography at the back of this publication.

About national crime trends

Myth

Crime in the Nation is rising by leaps and bounds.

Reality

The incidence of certain major crimes of violence and common theft is just about keeping pace with population growth.

A strong degree of **stability** characterized the rate at which the American people, as well as their homes and businesses, were victimized during 1973-76 by the selected offenses measured by the National Crime Survey (NCS). Year-to-year fluctuations in victimization rates were relatively **small**, even when statistically significant, and an overall trend had yet to form. Although additional confirmation is needed, the possibility is provocative that crime, like other measurable human activity, undergoes change in a **gradual**, undramatic way. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the volume of NCS-measured crime was high — averaging an estimated 39.9 million victimizations per year, including about 5.8 million violent offenses.

Personal, household, and commercial crimes: Victimization rates for the United States, by sector and type of crime, 1973-76

Sector and type of crime	1973	1974	1975	1976	Sector and type of crime	1973	1974	1975	1976
Personal sector¹					Household sector²				
Crimes of violence	32.8	33.0	32.8	32.8	Burglary	91.7	93.1	91.7	88.9
Rape	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.8	Forcible entry	29.7	30.7	30.9	30.4
Completed	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	Unlawful entry without force	41.9	42.4	40.5	37.7
Attempted	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	Attempted forcible entry	20.0	20.1	20.3	20.8
Robbery	6.7	7.2	6.8	6.5	Household larceny	107.0	123.8	125.4	124.1
Robbery with injury	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.1	Less than \$50	68.7	78.8	76.9	74.7
From serious assault	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.0	\$50 or more	26.9	32.9	37.1	36.6
From minor assault	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.1	Amount not available	3.7	4.1	3.8	4.0
Robbery without injury	4.4	4.8	4.6	4.4	Attempted	7.6	6.0	7.6	8.7
Assault	24.9	24.6	25.2	25.3	Motor vehicle theft	19.1	18.8	19.5	18.5
Aggravated assault	10.1	10.4	9.6	9.9	Completed	12.6	12.0	12.5	10.1
With injury	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.4	Attempted	6.4	6.8	7.0	6.3
Attempted with weapon	7.0	7.0	6.3	6.4	Number of households (1,000)	70,442	72,163	73,560	74,956
Simple assault	14.8	14.4	15.6	15.4					
With injury	3.7	3.6	4.1	4.0					
Attempted without weapon	11.1	10.9	11.4	11.4					
Crimes of theft	91.1	95.1	96.0	96.1	Commercial sector³				
Personal larceny with contact	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	Burglary	203.7	226.1	228.6	217.3
Purse snatching	1.1	0.9	1.1	0.9	Completed	151.3	170.5	167.8	164.1
Completed	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.5	Attempted	52.3	55.6	61.0	53.2
Attempted	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	Robbery	38.8	38.8	39.4	38.5
Pocket picking	2.0	2.2	2.0	2.0	Completed	28.6	30.9	30.5	28.5
Personal larceny without contact	88.0	92.0	92.9	93.2	Attempted	10.0	7.8	9.0	9.9
Population age 12 and over (1,000)	164,363	167,056	169,671	171,901	Number of businesses (1,000)	6,800	6,880	6,709	7,246

NOTE: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

*Significantly different from the preceding year's rate at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Significantly different from the preceding year's rate at the 90 percent confidence level; the absence of asterisks on 1974-76 figures denotes either no change in rates or the lack of statistical significance for apparent change.

¹Rate per 1,000 persons age 12 and over.

²Rate per 1,000 households.

³Rate per 1,000 commercial establishments.

Source: National crime survey.

About the extent of violent crime

Myth

Most crimes measured as taking place in the United States are of a violent nature.

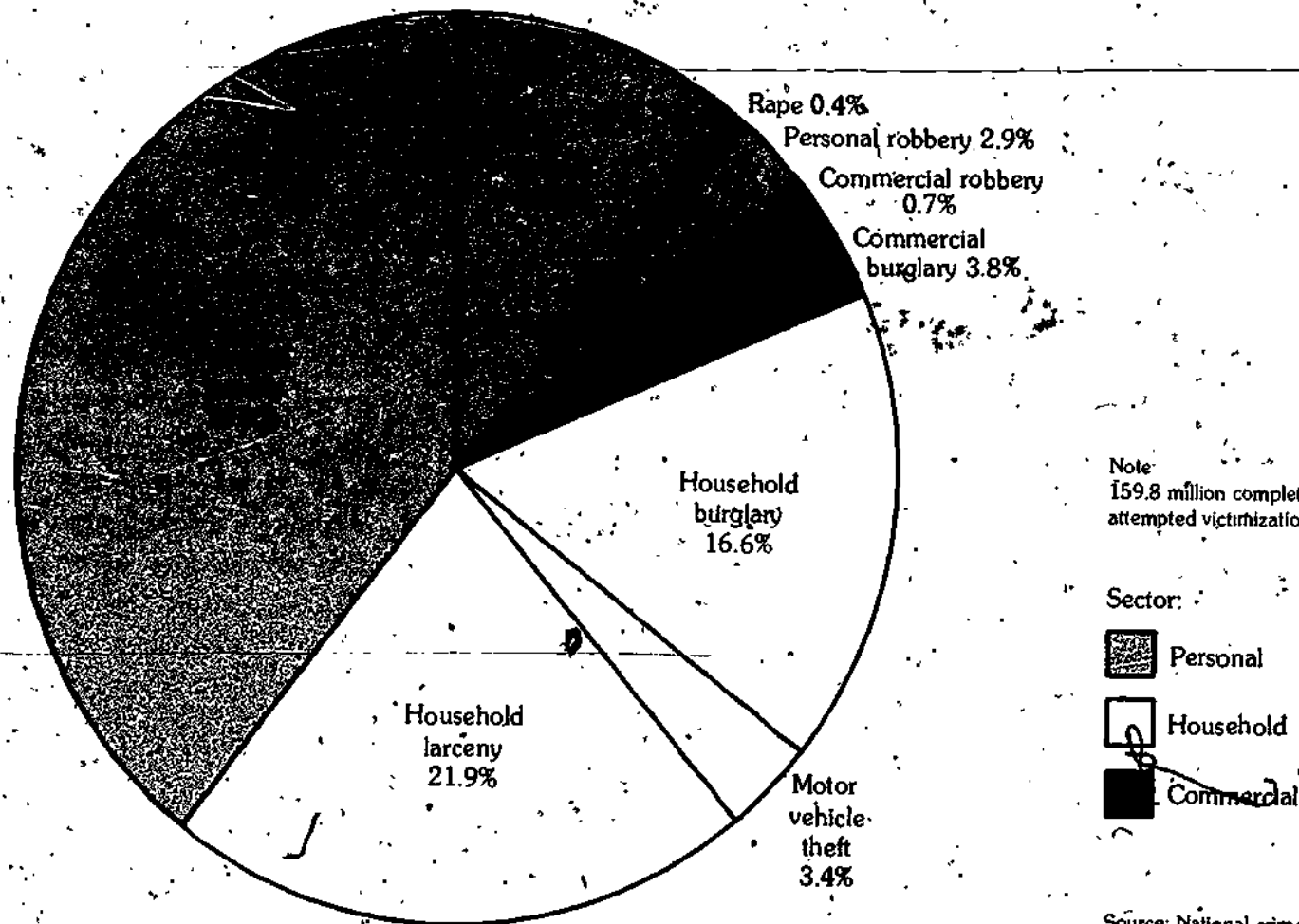
Reality

Of the NCS-measured offenses, the vast majority are against property only and do not involve personal violence or threat.

Although the National Crime Survey gauges the occurrence of but a limited number of types of offenses, those involving violence — rape, personal or commercial robbery, and assault — made up **only about 14 percent** of the total volume of crime measured for 1973-76.

Larceny of personal or household property was the most common crime, accounting for some 62 percent of those measured. About one-fifth of the offenses were burglaries, most of them residential, and the remainder (3 percent) were motor vehicle thefts. It must be pointed out, however, that two major violent crimes, homicide and kidnaping, are not addressed by the NCS and that the program was not designed to measure a variety of property offenses, including white collar crimes and commercial larcenies.

Personal, household, and commercial crimes: Percent of victimizations, by sector and type of crime, 1973-76



Note:
159.8 million completed and attempted victimizations

Sector:



Source: National crime surveys

About crime in big cities

Myth

The larger the city, the greater the likelihood that its residents will be the victims of crime.

Reality

For certain crimes, the residents of smaller cities have higher rates than those of our largest cities.

The rates of assault, personal or household larceny, and residential burglary have tended to be **relatively lower** for people living in our largest cities (i.e. 1 million or more population) than for those residing in smaller cities. Personal robbery rates, however, have been **higher** among the residents of the largest cities, and the occurrence of motor vehicle theft has been **more pronounced** for households located in cities of $\frac{1}{2}$ million or more inhabitants than in smaller ones. Cities in the $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 million population range have evidenced a relatively **high** household burglary rate.

**Personal and household crimes:
Victimization rates for central city
residents, by sector, type of crime,
and size of city, 1975 and 1976**

Sector and type of crime	50,000 to 249,999		250,000 to 499,999		500,000 to 999,999		1 million or more	
	1975	1976	1975	1976	1975	1976	1975	1976
Personal sector¹								
Crimes of violence	43.5	41.1	46.0	45.3	50.5	49.7	46.0	48.5
Rape	1.8	1.0	1.1	1.7	1.0	2.0	1.5	0.8
Robbery	6.2	7.3	9.9	9.7	14.4	13.8	19.1	18.5
Assault	35.7	32.6	35.1	33.9	35.1	34.1	25.4	29.2
Crimes of theft	112.5	111.6	105.3	114.6	131.5	128.2	91.5	91.6
Personal larceny with contact	2.4	2.1	4.4	4.5	7.0	6.2	6.4	9.5
Personal larceny without contact	110.0	109.5	100.9	110.0	124.5	122.0	83.1	82.1
Household sector²								
Burglary	119.2	114.6	126.4	121.7	134.7	130.1	97.2	95.6
Household larceny	163.8	153.5	154.1	173.6	177.0	159.6	90.0	89.0
Motor vehicle theft	26.0	17.5	26.4	20.6	32.0	29.7	32.9	27.0

NOTE: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

¹Rate per 1,000 city residents age 12 and over.

²Rate per 1,000 households.

Source: National crime survey

About police performance

Myth

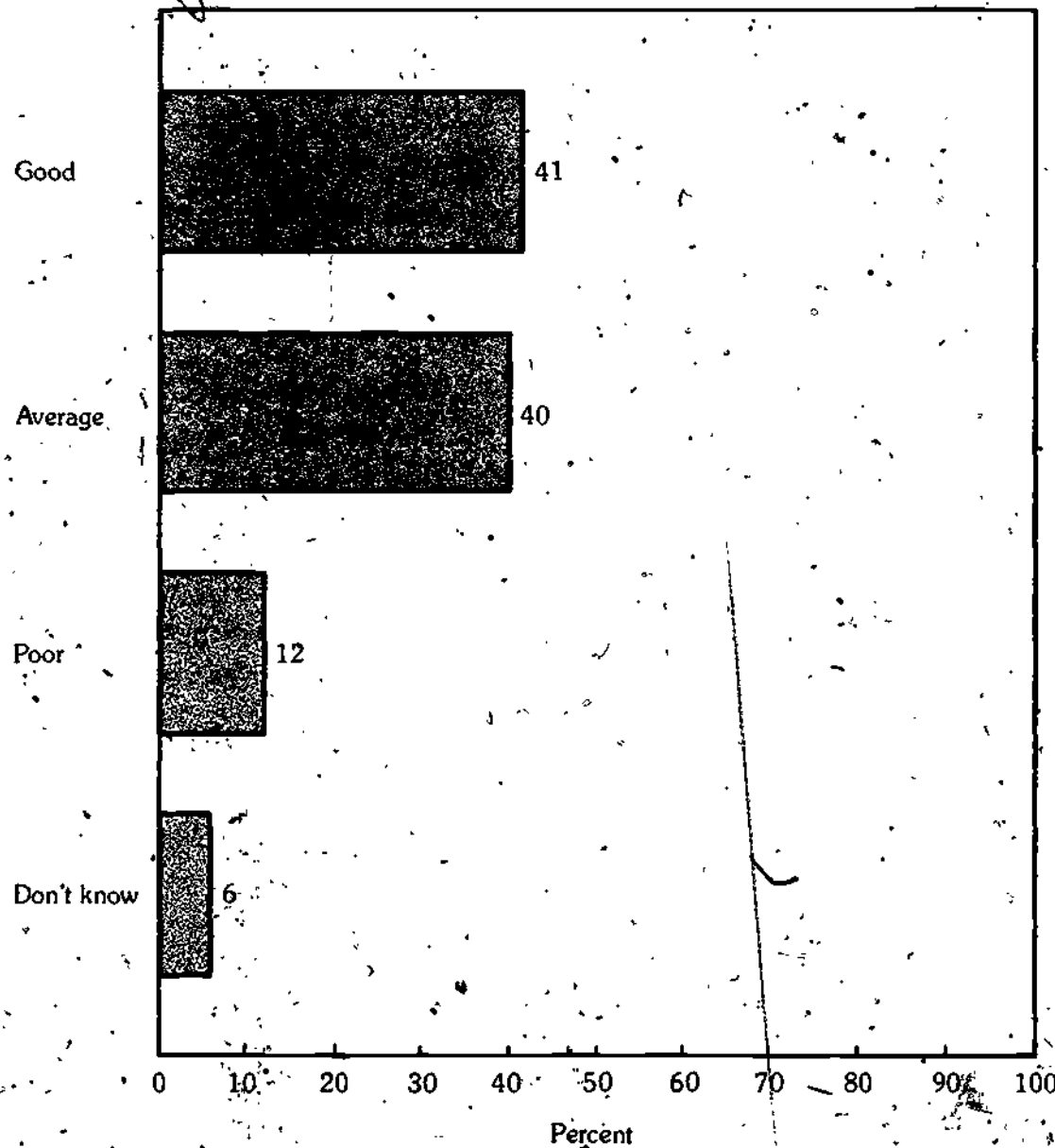
In general, residents of large cities believe their police are doing a poor job.

Reality

If the opinions of residents of numerous cities across the Nation are indicative, the vast majority is satisfied with the performance of their police.

When asked if their local police were doing a good, average, or poor job, some *four of every five* residents of 26 cities surveyed during 1974-75 gave ratings of *good* or *average*. Those who characterized the police work in that manner accounted for approximately 17.2 million of the estimated 21.1 million persons age 16 and over living in those cities. Some 2.5 million rated the police as poor, and 1.4 million had no opinion on the matter. Each of the 26 localities surveyed had a total population of 100,000 or more, and the group included the Nation's nine largest cities. Combined, the 26 cities had an estimated mid-1975 population of about 28.6 million. The interviews, however, were taken only among persons age 16 and over, and half the cities were surveyed in 1974.

**Residents of 26 central cities:
Ratings of police performance,
1974-75**



NOTE: Detail does not add to 100% because of rounding.
Data based on surveys conducted in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Newark, Oakland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland (Oregon), St. Louis, San Diego, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

Source: National crime survey

About reporting crime

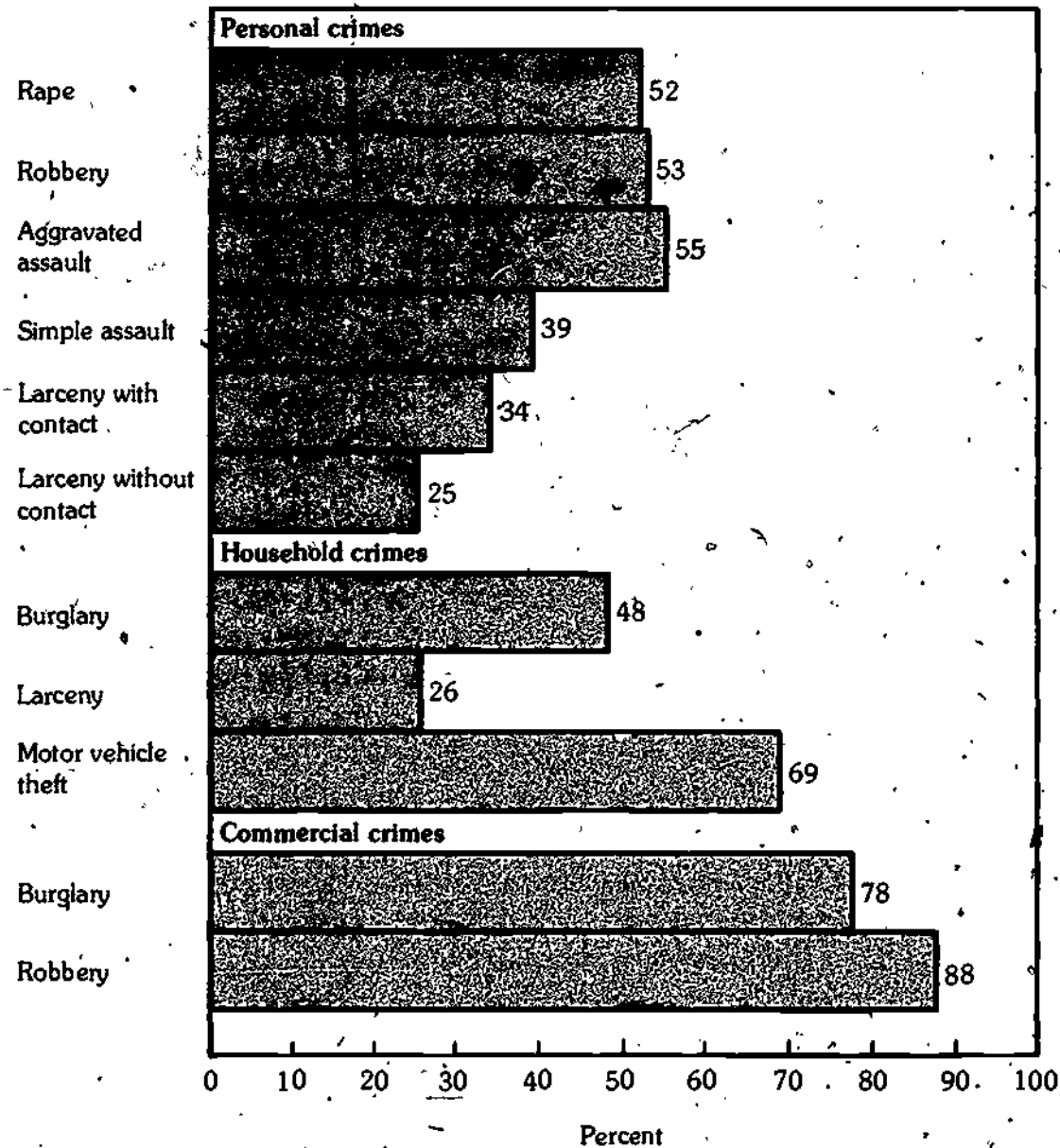
Myth

Most crime is reported to the police.

Reality

Slightly fewer than half of all offenses measured by the National Crime Survey are known to the police.

Although the rate at which victims report crimes to the police has varied widely depending on the type or seriousness of the crime, **fewer than a third** of personal offenses and only **38 percent** of household incidents were made known to the police during 1973-76. These relatively low overall rates of reporting can be ascribed in part to the prevalence of larceny—the least well reported of crimes—among offenses against individuals or residences. Burglary or robbery of businesses, together with motor vehicle theft, have had the **highest** police reporting rates. Of all crimes measured by the National Crime Survey during the 4-year period, some **48 percent were reported to the police**. Whether incurred by individuals, households, or businesses, the more serious forms of crime generally were more likely to be reported; because of space limitations, however, the accompanying chart distinguishes two forms of seriousness only for assault.



Personal, household, and commercial crimes: Percent of victimizations reported to the police, 1973-76

Source: National crime survey

About minorities and the police

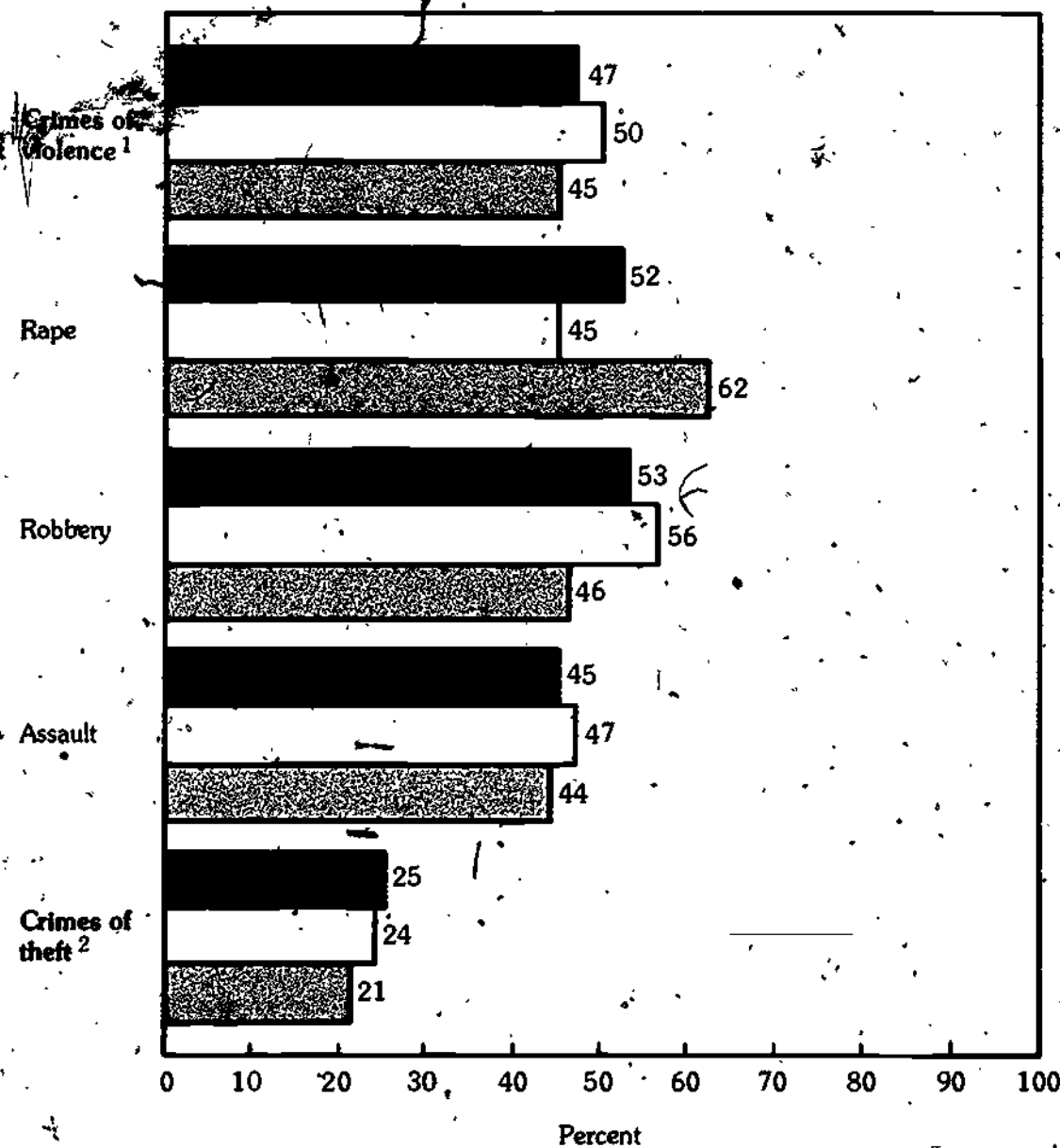
Myth

Blacks or Hispanics are less likely than the population as a whole to report personal crimes to the police.

Reality

By and large, the offenses experienced by members of those two minority groups are just about as apt to be reported as are crimes against victims in general.

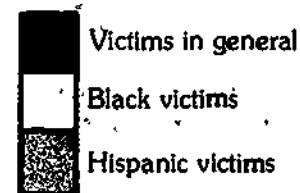
The rates at which black victims reported personal crimes of violence, whether the offenses are considered collectively or individually, as well as personal crimes of theft (i.e., larcenies), did *not differ* significantly from the corresponding rates for the population at large. Similar findings applied to the reporting of crimes by victims of Hispanic ancestry, except with respect to personal robberies or larcenies, which Hispanics were slightly *less likely* than victims in general to report to the police.



Personal crimes: Percent of victimizations reported to the police by minority group members; 1973-76

¹The aggregate of rape, robbery, and assault.

²Personal larceny with contact and personal larceny without contact



Source: National crime survey

About neighborhood problems

Myth

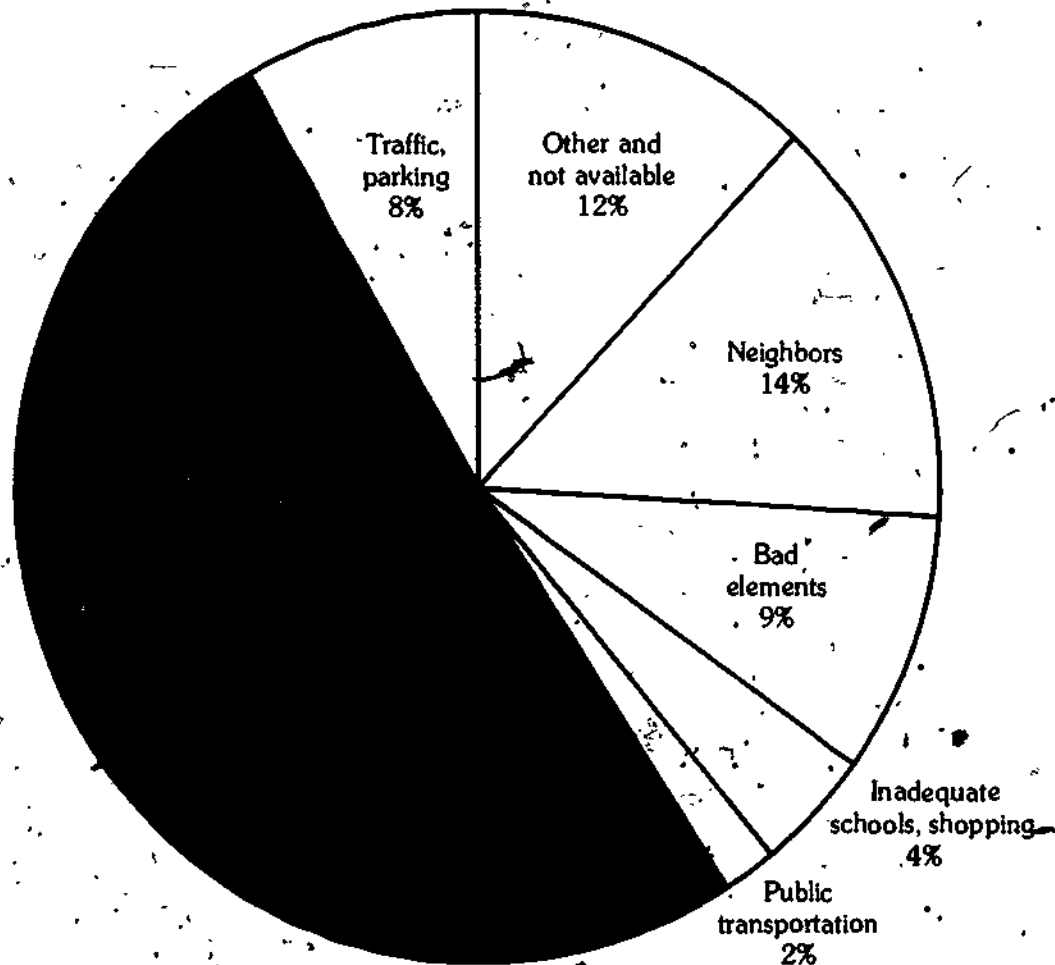
The residents of our large cities regard crime as the most important neighborhood problem.

Reality

Judging from the opinions of many city residents, environmental problems cause just about as much concern as crime.

"Is there anything you don't like about this neighborhood?" This question was asked of persons representing about 10.1 million households in 26 large cities across the Nation. Only **38 percent** answered "yes." These individuals, representatives for some 3.8 million households, were then asked what they disliked **most** about their neighborhoods. The two largest groups (26 percent each) felt that **crime or environmental deterioration**—trash, noise, overcrowding, and the like—were the main problems. Fourteen percent of the residents said they were displeased with their **neighbors**. Miscellaneous problems, none of them exceeding about one-tenth of all responses, were cited by the remainder. It must be remembered, however, that a majority of the individuals surveyed found no fault with their neighborhoods.

**Residents of 26 central cities:
Most important neighborhood
problem, 1974-75**



NOTE: Detail does not add to 100% because of rounding. The cities covered by the surveys are listed beside the chart on page 9.

Source: National crime survey

About neighborhood safety

Myth

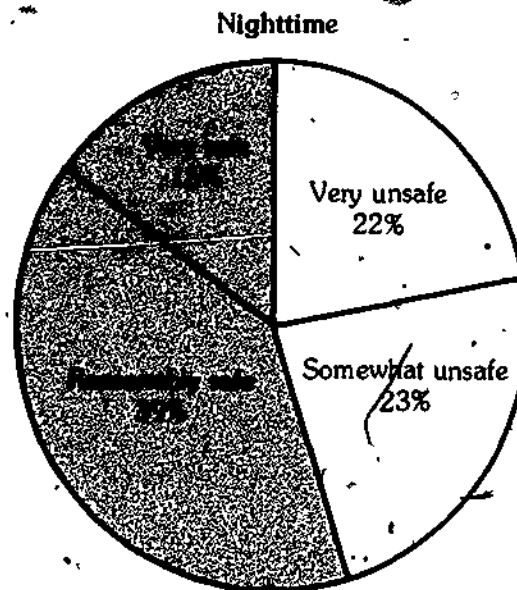
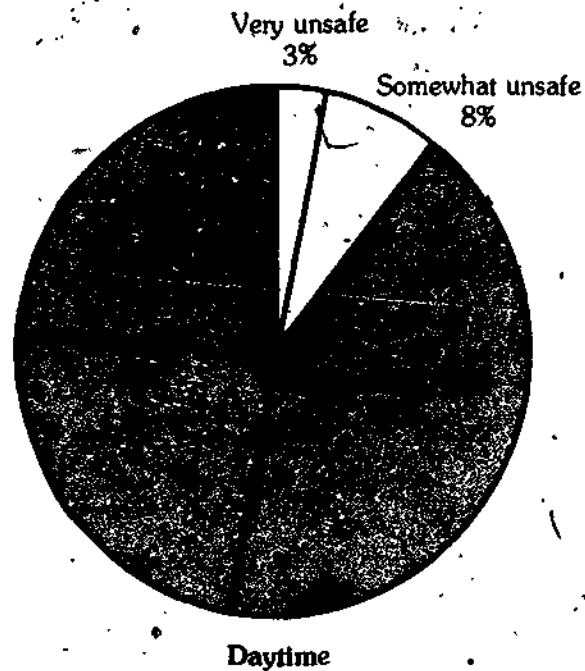
Most residents of large cities think their neighborhoods are not safe.

Reality

Most individuals feel at least reasonably safe when out alone in their neighborhoods either in the daytime or at night.

Nine in every ten persons living in 26 large cities surveyed during 1974-75 felt **very** or **reasonably safe** when out alone in their neighborhoods during daytime. Considerably fewer, although still a majority (54 percent), felt similarly with respect to nighttime. Concerning daytime conditions, "very safe" responses were the most prevalent, accounting for 48 percent, whereas "reasonably safe" was the most commonplace answer to the question about nighttime. Only 3 percent of the residents said they were **very unsafe** when out alone in their vicinity during the day, but about seven times that number felt likewise about nighttime.

**Residents of 26 central cities:
Neighborhood safety when out
alone, 1974-75**



NOTE: Detail does not add to 100% because of rounding. The cities covered by the surveys are listed beside the chart on page 9.

Source: National crime survey

About fear of crime

Myth

Most residents of large cities have limited or changed their activities because of the fear of crime.

Reality

If the assessments of an estimated 21.1 million persons are indicative, slightly fewer than half of all big-city residents have personally altered their lifestyles because of crime.

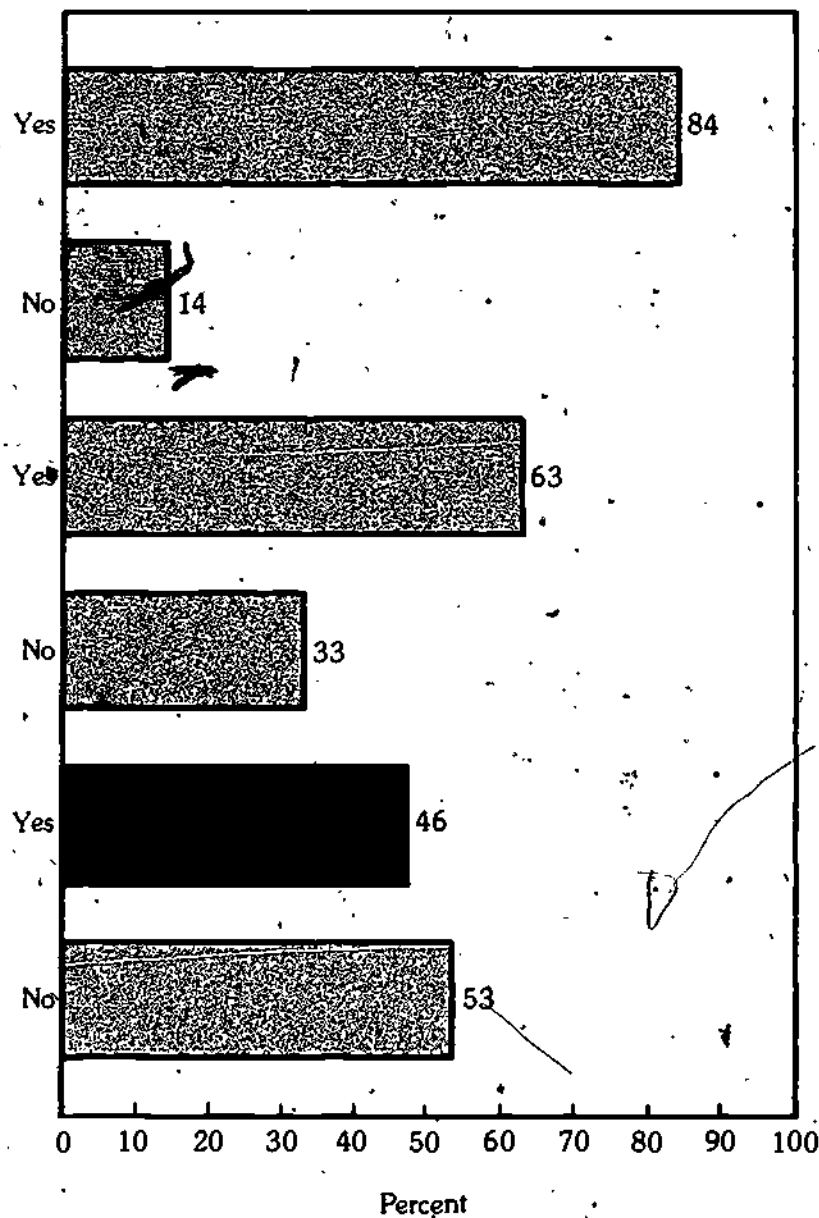
The belief that city people have had to modify their daily activities because of the threat of crime is widespread, even among city dwellers themselves. The results of attitude surveys conducted in 26 cities during 1974-75 suggest, however, that this opinion does not necessarily translate into a curtailment in personal activities. A **vast majority** of the residents of those cities thought that crime had caused "people in general" to limit or change their activities in recent years.

Most (63 percent) also believed that the residents of their own neighborhood had done so. For themselves personally, however, **46 percent** indicated they had altered their lifestyles. A slight majority was of the opinion that crime had **not affected** their lifestyles.

Activities changed
by people in general

Activities changed
by people in the
neighborhood

Activities changed
by the respondents
personally



Residents of 26 central cities: A belief that activities have been limited or changed because of the fear of crime, 1974-75

NOTE: Excludes respondents who gave no opinion. The cities covered by the surveys are listed beside the chart on page 9.

Source: National crime survey

About crime against the elderly

Myth

Elderly persons make up the most heavily victimized age group in our society.

Reality

Rates of victimization are far higher for young individuals than for senior citizens.

The National Crime Survey has demonstrated repeatedly that the elderly (age 65 and over) are the victims of personal crime, whether involving violence or theft only, at rates *far lower* than young individuals (age 12-24). The rates for residential crimes among households headed by elderly persons have also been *comparatively low*. These findings, however, ignore the trauma and economic burden brought about by crime, which no doubt weigh more heavily on elderly victims than on young ones. The lower rates among the elderly may relate to precautionary measures taken and/or to self-imposed isolation designed to minimize exposure to threatening situations. NCS attitude surveys conducted in 26 cities during 1974-75 revealed that senior citizens were *more likely* than younger persons to indicate they had modified their activities because of *fear of crime*. Well over half the estimated 3.2 million persons age 65 and over living in those cities said they had done so.

Type of crime and age	1973	1974	1975	1976	Type of crime and age	1973	1974	1975	1976
Personal sector¹					Burglary (cont.)				
Crimes of violence ²					50-64	69.7	69.3	68.1	67.5
12-24	60.5	60.6	59.4	59.0	65 and over	55.1	54.3	53.8	50.2
25-34	34.6	38.7	39.3	40.6	Household larceny				
35-49	21.6	20.9	20.5	20.0	12-19	202.8	205.9	221.0	178.1
50-64	13.1	11.8	13.5	12.2	20-34	145.9	175.0	171.5	171.9
65 and over	8.5	9.0	7.8	7.6	35-49	126.0	145.8	148.7	144.7
Crimes of theft ³					50-64	84.0	88.8	94.1	94.6
12-24	154.7	152.4	155.4	147.3	65 and over	47.4	57.9	58.7	59.5
25-34	99.0	106.2	109.9	113.2	Motor vehicle theft				
35-49	72.0	79.3	80.2	82.6	12-19	34.8	55.0	32.4	27.4
50-64	46.6	49.4	51.3	58.6	20-34	28.7	27.9	29.7	24.3
65 and over	22.2	21.9	24.5	26.0	35-49	21.1	20.9	21.7	18.9
Household sector⁴					50-64	15.8	14.3	15.0	12.3
Burglary					65 and over	5.4	5.7	6.2	6.1
12-19	220.5	218.5	214.5	207.3					
20-34	122.8	128.0	122.2	123.6					
35-49	99.1	99.3	101.5	92.8					

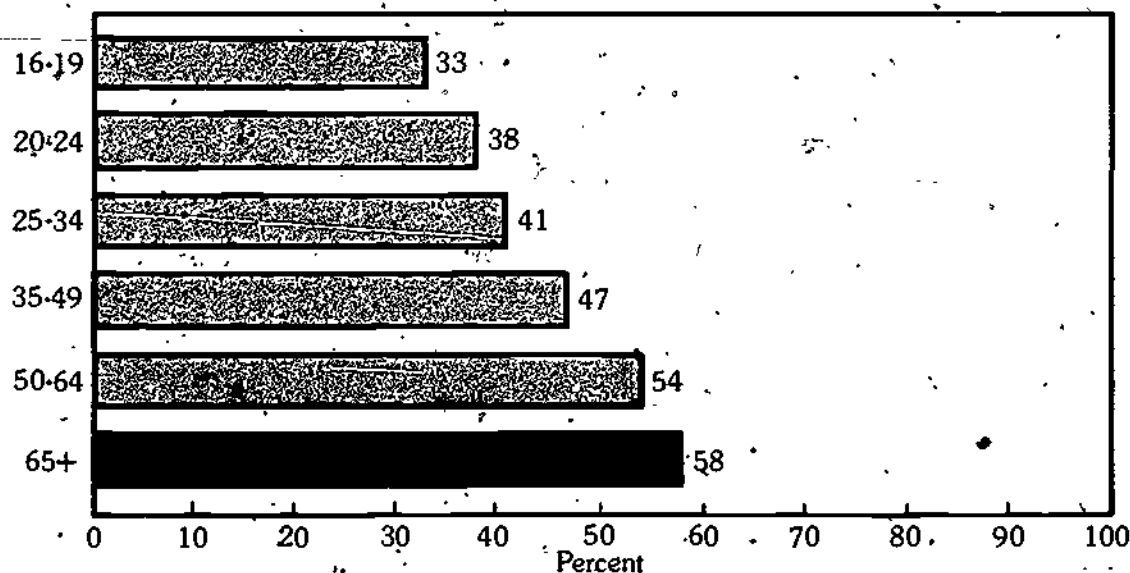
**Personal and household crimes:
Victimization rates, by type of crime
and age of victims, 1973-76**

¹Rate per 1,000 population in each age group

²Includes rape, robbery, and assault

³Includes personal larceny with contact and personal larceny without contact

⁴Rate per 1,000 households headed by persons in each age group



**Residents of 26 central cities:
A belief that personal activities
have been limited or changed
because of the fear of crime, by
age of respondents, 1974-75**

NOTE: The cities covered by the surveys are listed beside the chart on page 9

Source: National crime survey

About crime against women

Myth

Women are more likely than men to be the victims of crime.

Reality

For various personal crimes, men are victimized at higher rates than women.

For personal robbery or assault, as well as for personal larceny without victim-offender contact, men have been victimized at **appreciably higher** rates than women. With respect to the two violent crimes, men had **consistently higher** 1973-76 victimization rates than women for cases in which the victim and offender were strangers to one another. Also, men were **somewhat likelier** than women to have experienced assaults at the hands of nonstrangers. Aside from rape, the only NCS-measured personal crime having a **higher** rate for women was larceny with contact (i.e., purse snatchings and pocket pickings); however, the rate differences for this class of crime have been nominal, if not statistically insignificant.

**Personal crimes: Victimization rates
for persons of each sex, by victim-
offender relationship, 1973-76**

(Rate per 1,000 persons age 12 and over)

Type of crime	1973		1974		1975		1976	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Crimes of violence	44.3	21.8	45.3	21.7	43.6	23.0	42.9	23.1
By strangers	31.7	12.1	32.6	12.1	30.9	12.8	30.4	12.2
By nonstrangers	12.8	9.7	12.7	9.6	12.7	10.4	12.5	10.9
Rape	0.1	1.8	(2)	1.8	0.1	1.7	0.2	1.4
By strangers	(2)	1.4	(2)	1.4	0.1	1.1	0.2	1.0
By nonstrangers	(2)	0.3	(2)	0.5	(2)	0.5	(2)	0.5
Robbery	9.9	3.8	10.3	4.3	9.8	4.0	9.1	4.0
By strangers	8.8	3.0	9.1	3.3	8.4	3.3	7.9	2.9
By nonstrangers	1.2	0.8	*1.2	1.0	1.3	0.7	*1.2	1.1
Assault	34.3	18.2	34.9	15.8	33.7	17.3	33.6	17.8
By strangers	23.0	7.6	23.4	7.4	22.4	8.2	22.4	6.4
By nonstrangers	11.4	8.6	11.5	8.2	11.3	9.1	11.2	9.3
Crimes of theft	102.8	80.3	108.9	82.5	108.1	84.9	106.2	88.6
Personal larceny with contact	2.6	3.5	*3.0	3.3	*2.9	3.3	2.5	3.2
Personal larceny without contact	100.2	78.8	105.9	79.2	105.2	81.7	103.7	83.8

NOTE: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

Z: Less than 0.05 per 1,000.

*At a 90 percent minimum confidence level, the rate for males was not significantly different from that for females.

Source: National crime survey

About armed violence

Myth

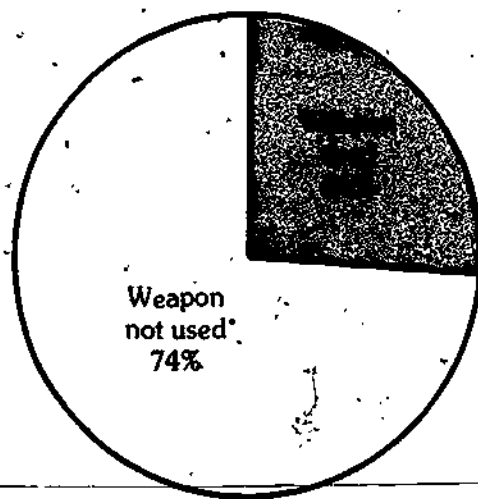
A weapon is used by the offender in nearly all rapes, robberies, and assaults.

Reality

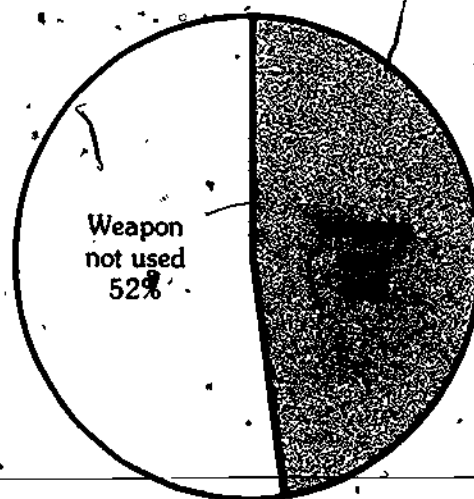
Weapons are used in far fewer than half all those crimes.

Of the three violent personal crimes measured during 1973-76 by the National Crime Survey, rape was the *least* likely and robbery was the *most* likely to have been perpetrated by armed offenders. With 35 percent of all incidents involving an offender who used a weapon, assault ranked in between the other two personal crimes. On the other hand, an average of **71 percent** of all robberies of businesses during the 4-year period involved armed encounters. Because of the prevalence of personal crimes of violence, however, the average for all four of these crimes taken together was **39 percent**.

Rape

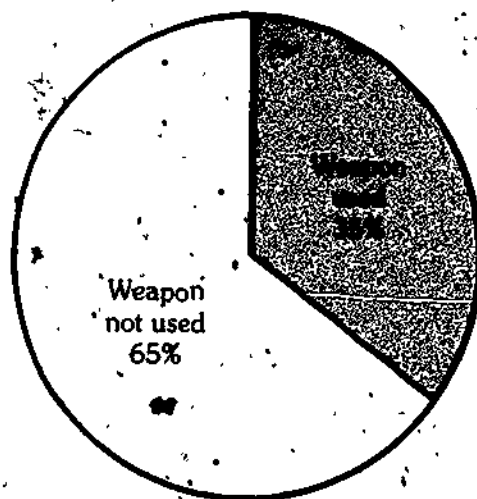


Personal robbery

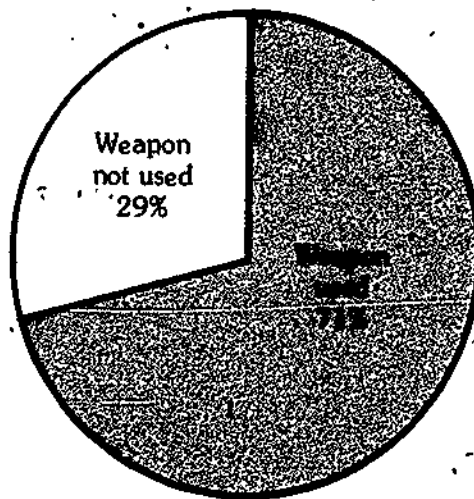


Personal crimes of violence and commercial robbery: Percent of incidents in which the offenders used weapons, 1973-76

Assault



Commercial robbery



Source: National crime survey

About weapons and injuries

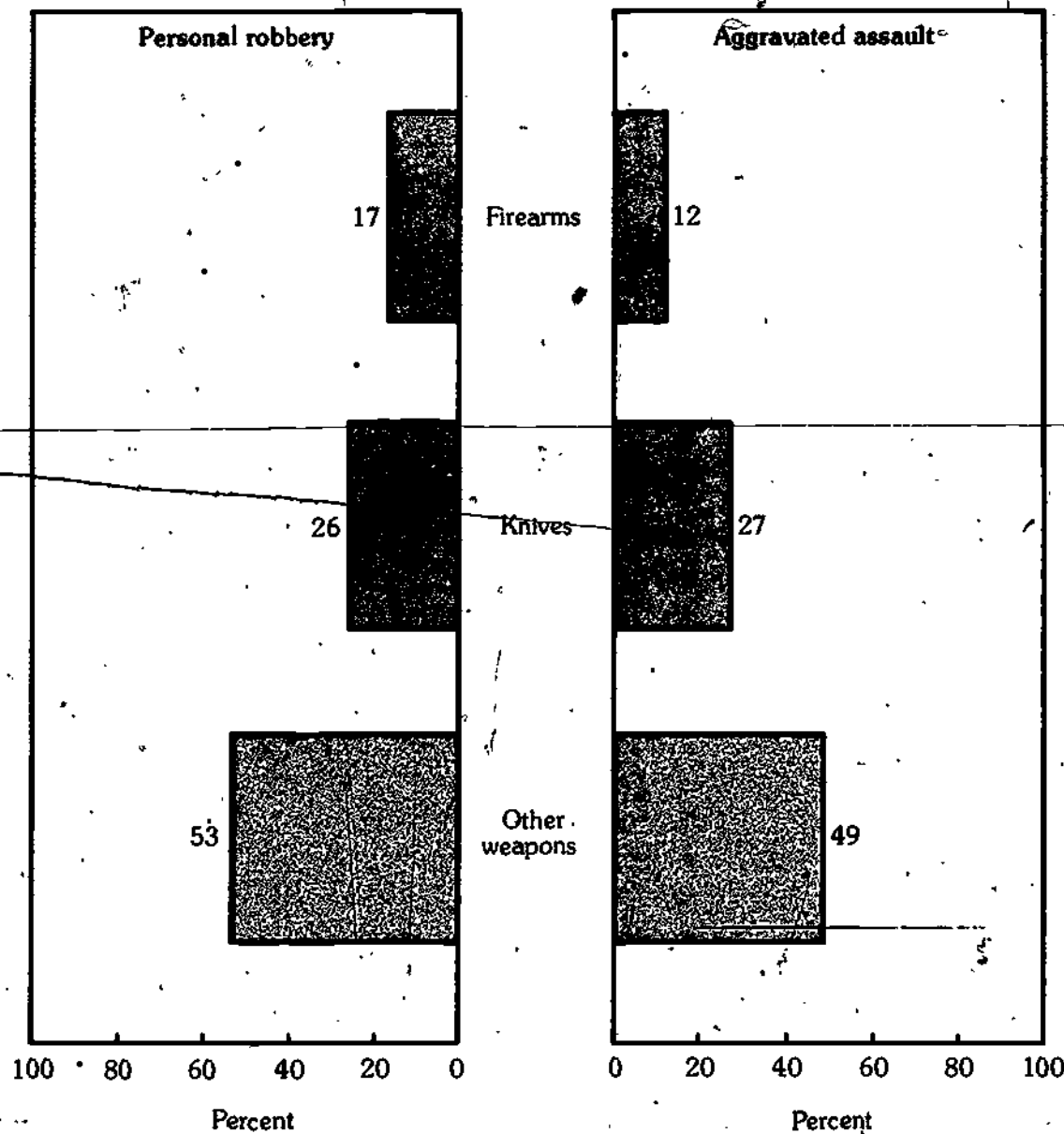
Myth

A victim is more likely to be injured during an armed assault or robbery if the offender wields a firearm rather than a knife or other weapon.

Reality

The victim's likelihood of sustaining injury at the hands of an armed offender is lessened if the weapon is a firearm.

In the course of either an aggravated assault or personal robbery by an armed offender, the likelihood of victim injury has been **greatest** when the crime was carried out with the aid of an object **other than a firearm or knife**, such as a club, brick, wrench, or bottle. The presence of a knife, as opposed to a firearm, has also been associated with a higher incidence of victim injury. These findings, based on 1973-76 National Crime Survey data, suggest that victims are less apt to resist a criminal armed with a lethal weapon and, therefore, are less likely to be injured. It must be pointed out, however, that as presently constituted, the NCS makes no determination of the actual **cause of injury**; therefore, the accompanying chart should not be construed to represent the percentage of incidents in which victims were harmed by the weapons listed. Also, the program does **not measure kidnapping** or violent crimes resulting in **death**, for which the relationships among types of weapons may differ from those portrayed for assault and personal robbery.



Personal robbery and aggravated assault: Percent of incidents in which offenders used weapons and victims sustained injury, by type of weapon, 1973-76

NOTE: Excludes incidents in which weapons of more than one type were used, as well as those for which the type of weapon was not known.

Source: National crime survey

About using force for self-defense

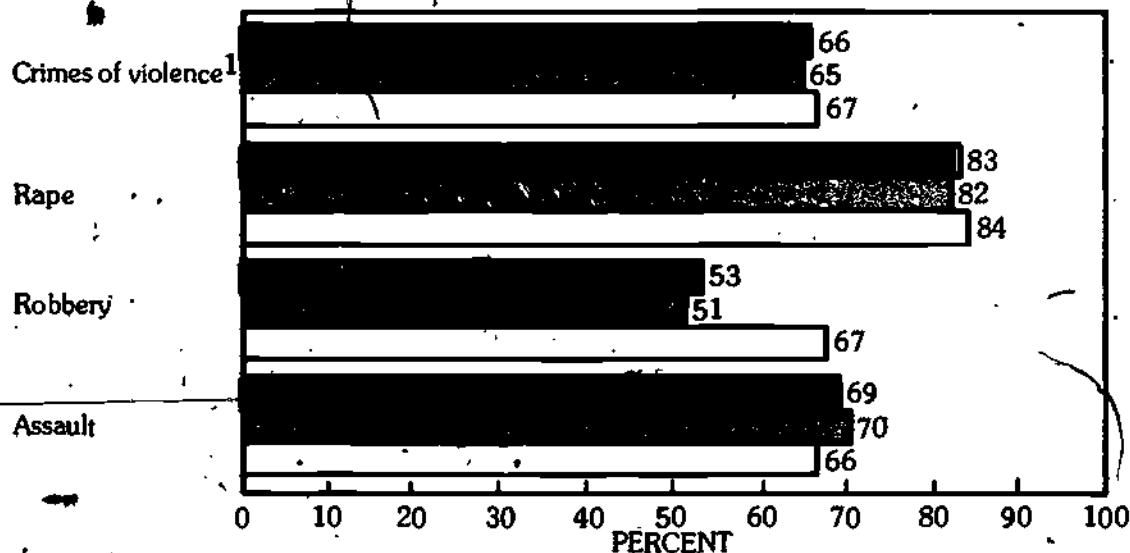
Myth

People often use force or weapons for self-defense from criminal attack.

Reality

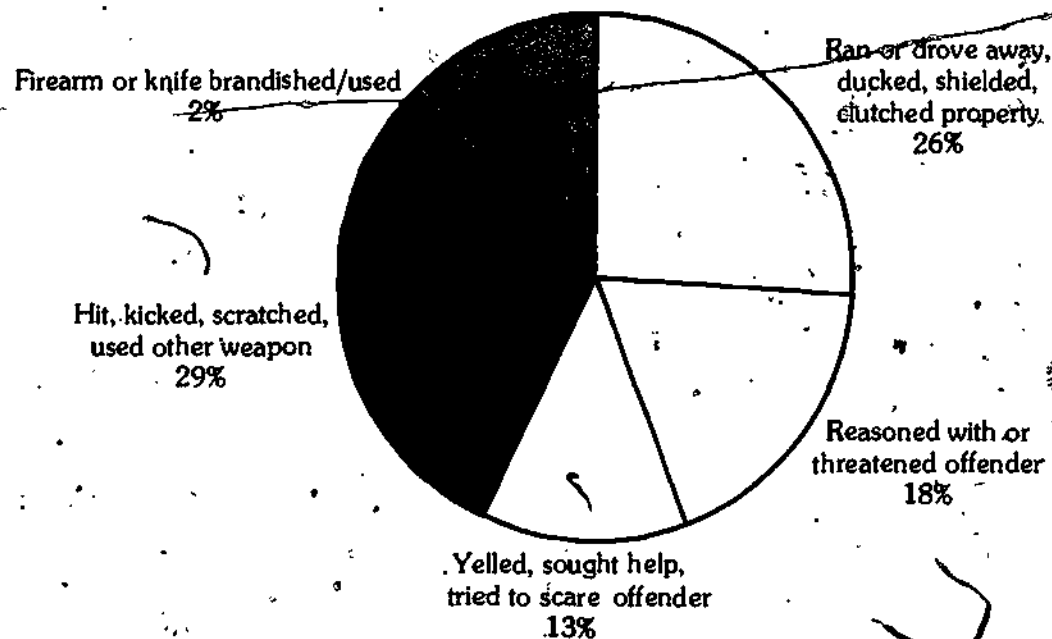
Although victims defend themselves in a majority of rapes, robberies, or assaults, passive methods are more commonly used for protection.

Victims took some measure of self-protection in about **two-thirds** of the personal crimes of violence (i.e., rapes, robberies, and assaults) that occurred during 1974-76. They were most apt to have done so in cases of rape and least likely in those of robbery. The likelihood of employing self-defense did not, however, differ markedly if the encounters were between strangers or nonstrangers. Only with respect to robbery were the victims appreciably less likely to defend themselves in stranger-to-stranger confrontations than in cases involving nonstrangers. Although a substantial number of victims employed **physical means** of resistance, such as striking the offender (29 percent) or using a gun or knife (2 percent), far more resorted to a variety of **passive methods**—sought help, ran away, hid, ducked, reasoned with the offender, and so forth (58 percent).



Personal crimes of violence: Percent of victimizations in which victims took self-protective measures, by victim-offender relationship, 1974-76

¹The aggregate of rape, robbery, and assault.



Personal crimes of violence: Self-protective measures used by victims, 1974-76.

NOTE: Detail does not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: National crime survey

About victim injury

Myth

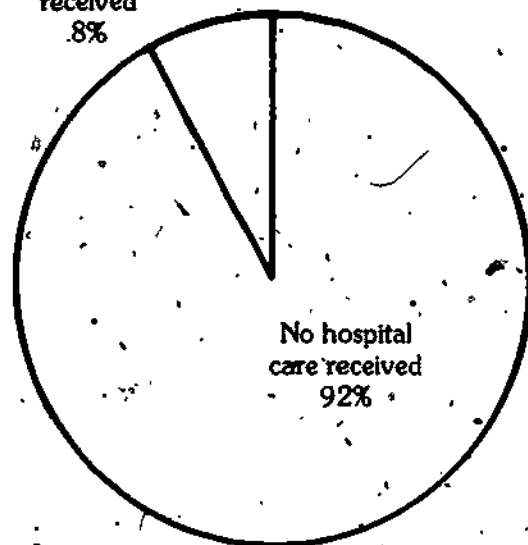
More often than not, the victims of violent crimes other than homicide end up in a hospital.

Reality

Relatively few victims of rape, robbery, or assault get hospital care, either in an emergency room or as inpatients.

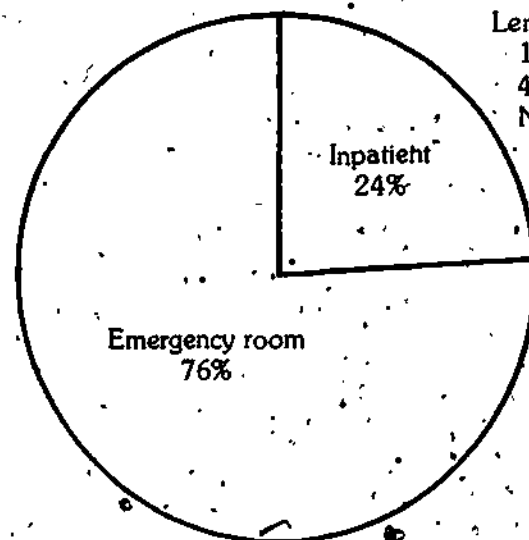
In only **8 percent** of personal crimes of violence (i.e., rape, robbery, and assault considered collectively) that happened during 1973-76, the victims were treated in hospitals. Of those treated, 24 percent obtained **inpatient** care, whereas the majority received **emergency room** treatment and were released. Among those hospitalized as inpatients, victims were somewhat more likely to be confined for 4 or more days than for a shorter period.

Hospital care
received
8%



**Personal crimes of violence: Percent
of victimizations in which victims
received hospital care, 1973-76**

Length of stay
1-3 days 8%
4+ days 14%
Not available 1%



**Personal crimes of violence: Percent
of victimizations in which victims
received hospital care, by type of
care, 1973-76**

NOTE: Detail does not add to subtotal because of
rounding.

Source: National crime survey

About the classic hold-up

Myth

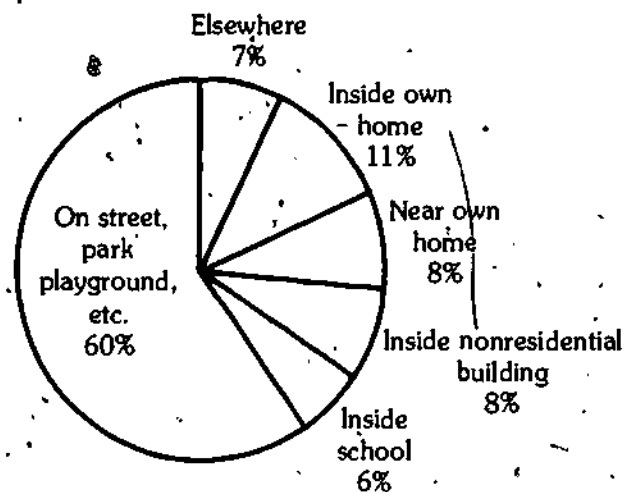
The typical personal robbery is carried out against a lone pedestrian by an armed offender operating alone.

Reality

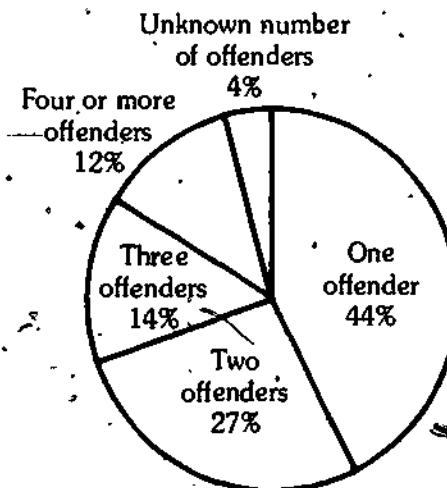
Although the victim is usually alone and outdoors, the robber does not necessarily work alone or use a weapon.

While it is true that the vast bulk of personal robberies happened to lone victims and most took place on streets or other outdoor places, **about half** of the incidents committed during 1973-76 were **by two or more offenders**, many of whom did **not** employ a weapon. In fact, **unarmed** robberies took place just about **as often as armed** robberies, and the presence of a weapon was somewhat more likely in multiple-offender incidents than in those involving offenders who operated alone.

Place of occurrence

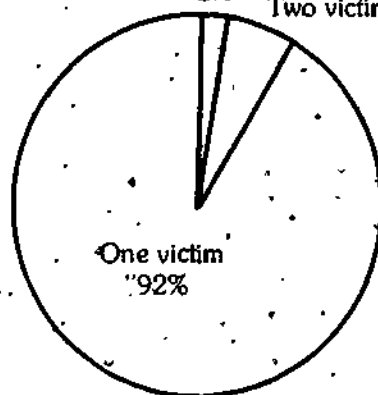


Number of offenders

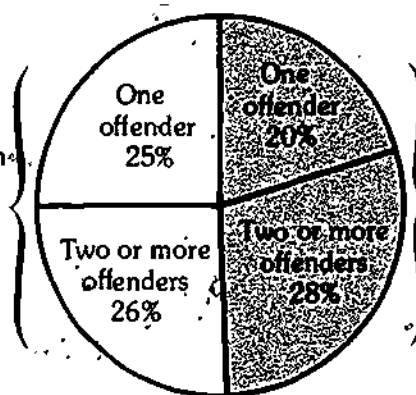


Personal robbery: Selected incident characteristics, 1973-76

Number of victims



Weapon not used



Weapon used

Number of victims

Use of weapons, by number of offenders

NOTE: Detail may not add to 100% because of rounding

Source: National crime survey

About residential burglars

Myth

Household burglars usually commit their crimes by breaking into the premises.

Reality

In a majority of completed residential burglaries committed throughout the United States, burglars gain entry into homes or apartments without resorting to force.

Most burglars are successfully carrying out their crimes *simply by entering* through unlocked doors or windows, or by using keys. Some 57 percent of all completed household burglaries that took place during 1973-76 were unlawful entries *without force*, whereas the remainder were *forcible entries*. Probably as a result of a greater concern for household security on the part of urban dwellers, burglaries of central city or suburban residences were more likely than those in nonmetropolitan places to have been *break-ins*.

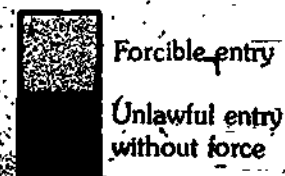
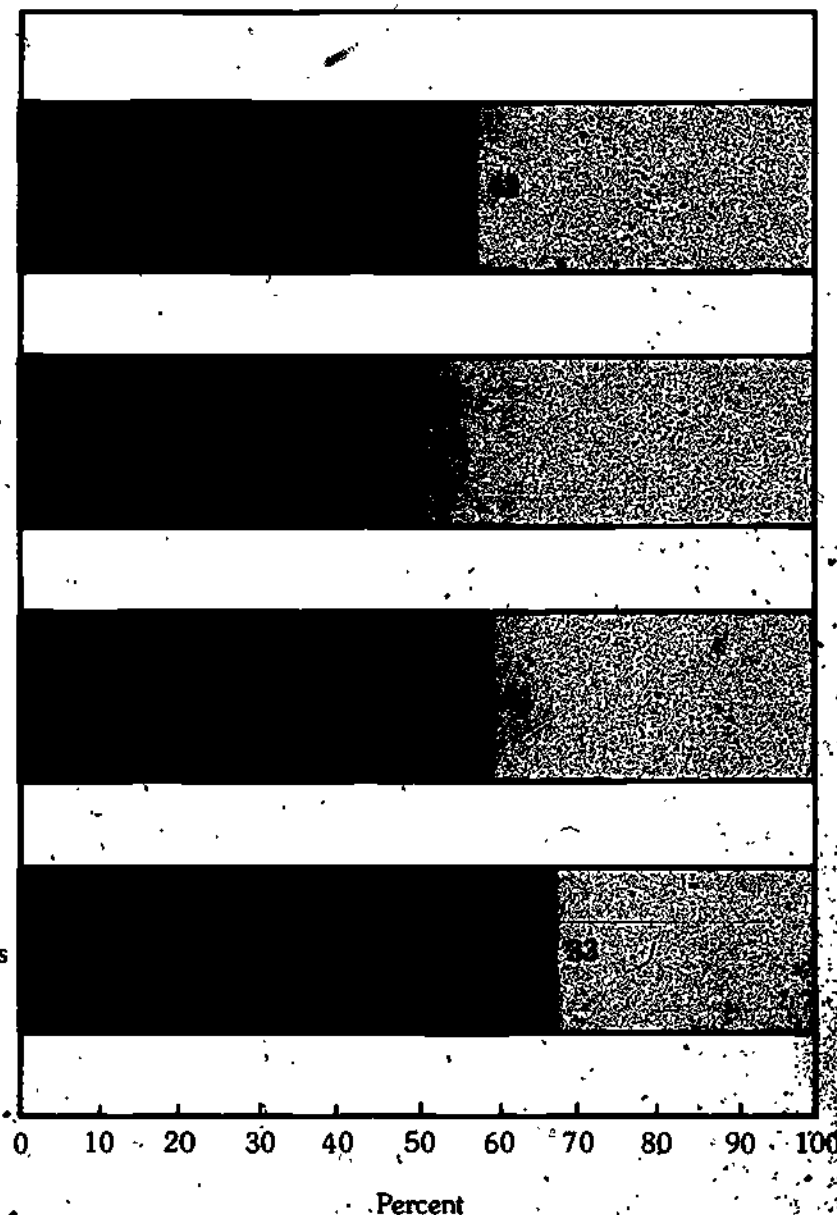
Household burglary: Percent distribution of completed victimizations, by type of entry and place of residence, 1973-76

Total U.S.

Central cities

Suburbs

Nonmetropolitan areas



20.7 million completed burglaries

Source: National crime survey

About victim-offender relationships

Myth

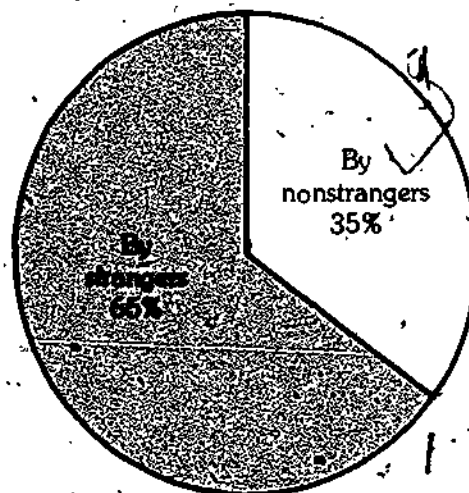
The victims of crime seldom know or recognize their offenders.

Reality

A substantial number of crimes are committed by persons known to their victims:

In **35 percent** of the estimated 22 million rapes, personal robberies, or assaults that took place during 1973-76, the victims were acquainted with, if not related to, the offenders. It is reasonable to assume, moreover, that many more crimes (especially assaults) by nonstrangers were **not revealed** to National Crime Survey interviewers. In addition, attitude surveys conducted in 26 large cities during 1974-75 showed that an average of **36 percent** of persons victimized in the preceding year believed that neighborhood crime was being committed either by persons living within the vicinity or by insiders and outsiders alike.

Nevertheless, the largest number of residents attributed crime to offenders from outside the neighborhood, and one-fourth did not know where the culprits came from. Only 3 percent indicated their neighborhoods were free of crime.



Personal crimes of violence¹:
Percent of victimizations committed
by strangers and nonstrangers,
1973-76

¹The aggregate of rape, robbery, and assault.

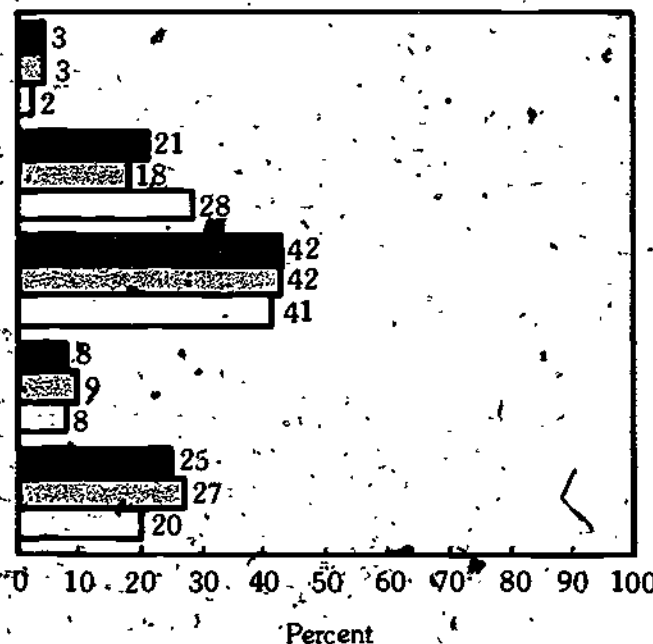
There is no neighborhood crime

People within neighborhood are committing the crimes

People outside neighborhood are committing the crimes

Crimes are being committed equally by insiders and outsiders

Don't know who is responsible



Residents of 26 central cities:
Opinions about the place of
residence of persons committing
neighborhood crime, by
victimization experience, 1974-75

■ All residents
 ■ Not victimized
 ■ Victimized

NOTE. The cities covered by the surveys are listed beside the chart on page 9.

Source: National crime survey

About serious assaults by strangers

Myth

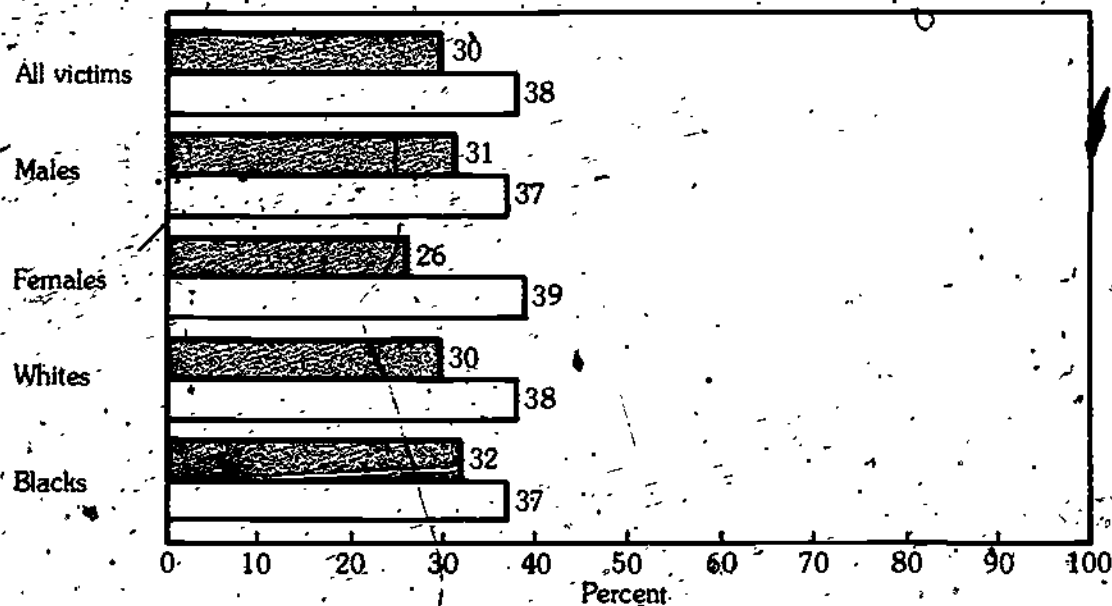
Aggravated assaults are more likely to result in physical injury if the attacker is a total stranger.

Reality

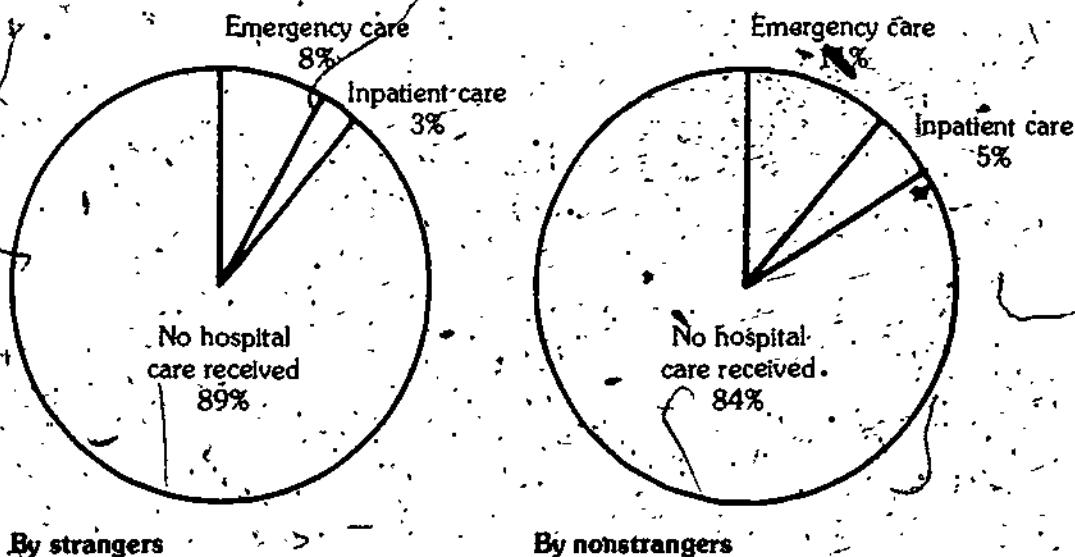
One's chances of being injured and ending up in a hospital are somewhat greater if the assailant is not a stranger.

Of the estimated 2.4 million aggravated assaults committed during 1973-76 by friends, casual acquaintances, or relatives, some 38 percent resulted in physical injury to the victims. This compares with a 30 percent injury rate for the 4.3 million crimes in which the assailants were strangers. The higher injury rate among the victims of nonstrangers applied to men and women, as well as to whites. Women, in particular, were *more likely* to be injured by nonstrangers than by strangers. There was no statistically significant difference between the two injury rates for black victims. As suggested by hospitalization rates for the victims of aggravated assault, moreover, persons attacked by nonstrangers probably sustained *serious injuries* relatively more often than those who experienced stranger-to-stranger offenses. The hospitalization rate for the latter was some 5 percentage points lower.

Aggravated assault: Percent of victimizations resulting in victim injury, by victim-offender relationship, 1973-76



Aggravated assault: Percent of victimizations in which victims received hospital care, by victim-offender relationship, 1973-76



Source: National crime survey

About the criminal as a loner

Myth

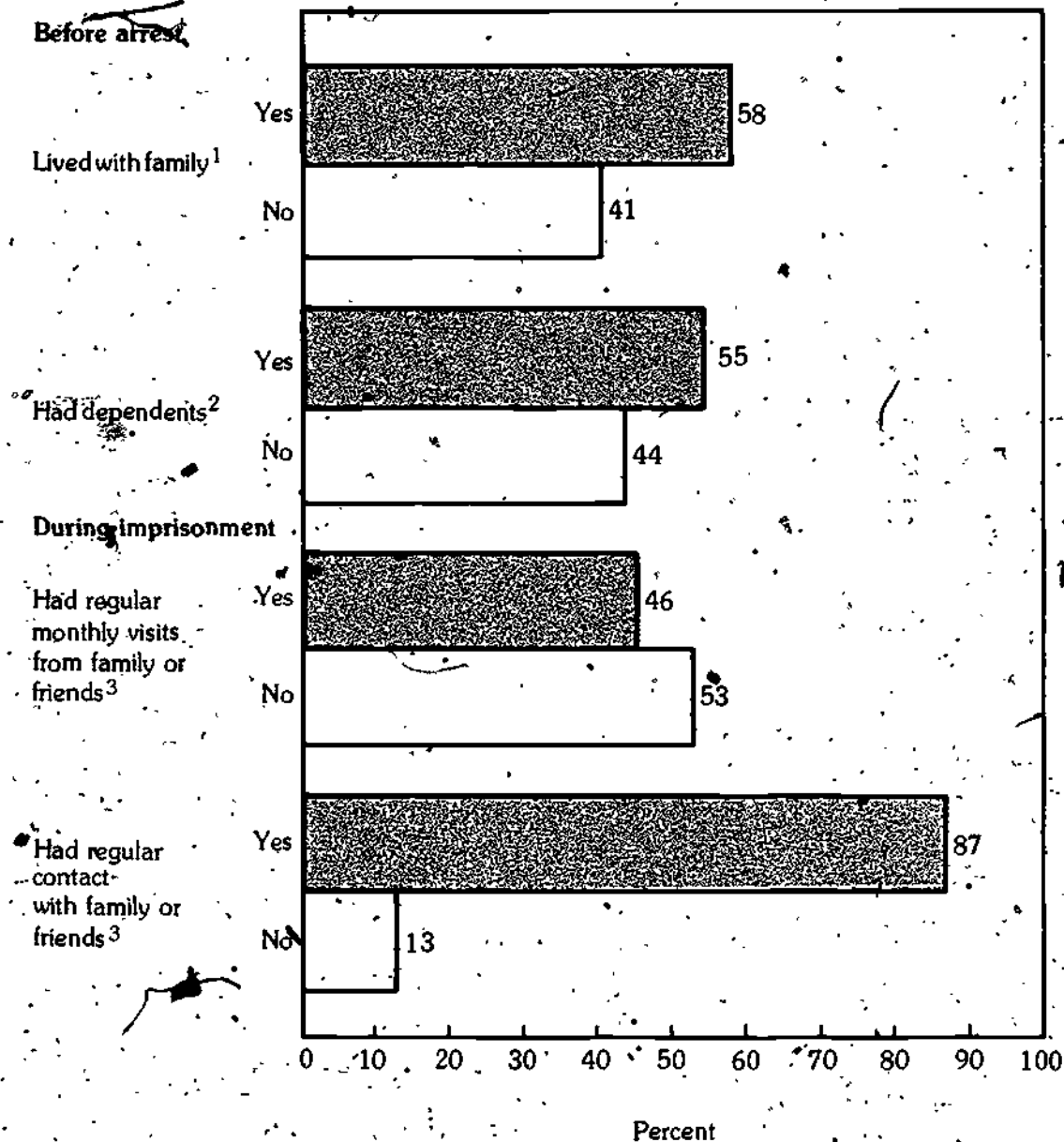
The typical prison inmate is a "loner" with no family or friends and little social contact.

Reality

Perhaps because most had lived in a family situation prior to their arrest, prisoners are quite likely to maintain regular social contacts during incarceration.

Although some inmates of State correctional facilities fit the stereotype of the "social misfit," devoid of family ties or friendships, most appear to have had social relationships both before arrest and during imprisonment. Some three-fifths of all inmates questioned about their living arrangements **had lived with family** members before the arrest; indeed, many were **supporting** relatives, or others, besides themselves. Once in prison, 46 percent of all sentenced inmates were **being visited** by family and/or friends at least monthly; 26 percent had less frequent visits, and only 27 percent never saw outsiders. The vast majority of sentenced inmates — some 87 percent — maintained **regular communication** by telephone or letter with relatives or acquaintances; this group included roughly 64 percent who had such contacts at least once a week and 23 percent at least once a month. An additional 7 percent had less frequent external contacts.

State prison inmates: Social relationships before arrest and during imprisonment, 1974



¹Based on an estimated 168,363 inmates who held jobs during month prior to arrest or at any time after December 1968.

²Based on an estimated 160,772 inmates with prearrest employment and income.

³Based on an estimated 187,487 sentenced inmates.

Source: Survey of inmates of state correctional facilities.

About drugs and crime

Myth

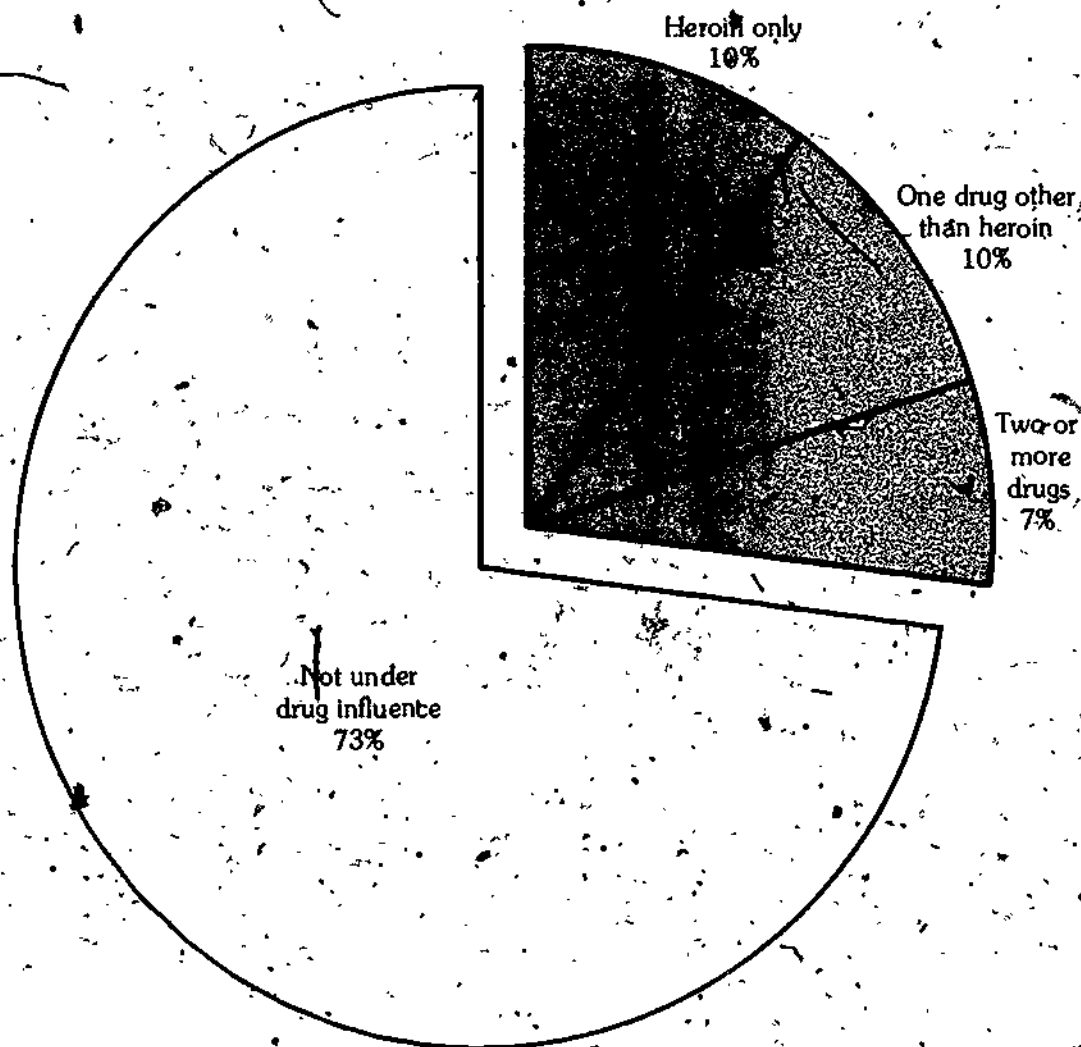
People are usually under the influence of drugs when they commit a crime.

Reality

If the experience of those imprisoned for all types of offenses is indicative, the occurrence of most crime cannot be attributed to drug-induced aberrant behavior.

As of 1974, a *majority* of the inmates of State correctional facilities were *not under the influence* of drugs (other than alcohol) when committing the crimes, whether against persons or property, that led to their incarceration. Roughly 1 in 4 of these inmates had been under the influence of some type of drug. Of those who *had been on drugs*, 36 percent (or one-tenth of the total) said they had been using heroin exclusively at the time of the offense. An equal proportion had been under the influence of one other drug, such as marijuana, amphetamines, or barbiturates. The remaining inmates had been using a combination of two or more drugs.

**State prison inmates: Percent under
influence of drugs at time of offense,
1974**



NOTE: Based on the total prison population —
an estimated 191,367 inmates.

Source: Survey of inmates of state correctional facilities

About unemployment and crime

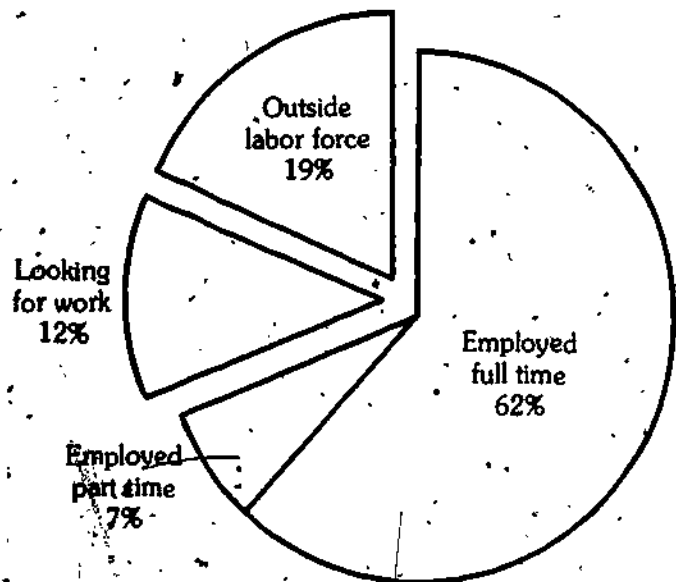
Myth

The typical person who commits a crime is either unemployed or on-welfare.

Reality

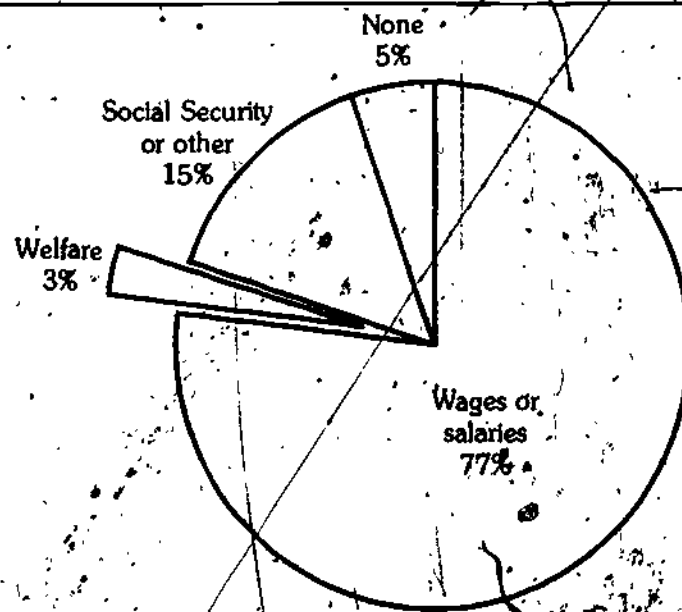
Based on what is known about imprisoned criminals, most persons who engage in crime have jobs and very few are welfare-dependent.

As of 1974, State correctional facilities were *not* populated chiefly by the unemployed or indigent. On the contrary, roughly two-thirds of the inmates had *held jobs*, the bulk of them on a full-time basis, during the month before their arrest. Twelve percent had *sought* employment during that period, whereas 19 percent were *not looking* for jobs, either because they did not want to or could not work. As for the main source of income during the year prior to incarceration, some 77 percent of the inmates lived mainly off *wages or salaries*. Only 3 percent had been dependent upon *welfare* assistance. It should be pointed out, however, that among inmates who had income from any source, the median amount was relatively low — only \$4,630. This figure was about *45 percent lower* than the 1974 median for all income-earning males age 14 and over, the group in the general population most nearly comparable with the inmate population.



State prison inmates: Employment status during month prior to arrest, 1974

NOTE: Based on the total prison population—an estimated 191,367 inmates.



State prison inmates: Main source of income during year prior to arrest, 1974

NOTE: Based on an estimated 168,363 inmates who held jobs during month prior to arrest or at any time after December 31, 1968.

Source: Survey of inmates of state correctional facilities.

About blacks on death row

Myth

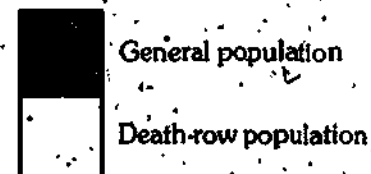
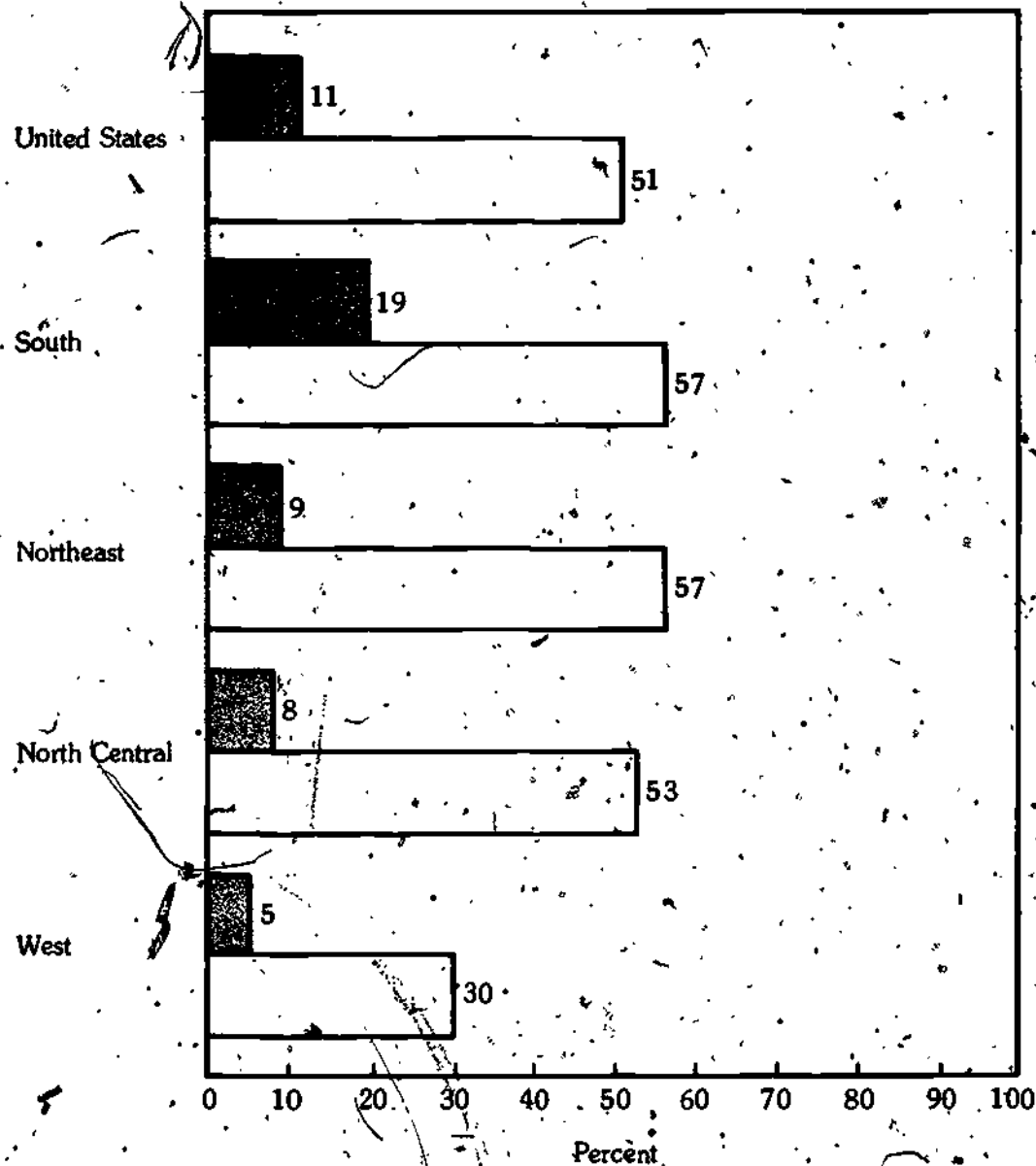
Although blacks are over-represented on death row across the Nation, this overrepresentation is more pronounced in the South than in the other regions.

Reality

Black overrepresentation on death row is less pronounced in the South than in the other major regions.

During the period 1972-76, blacks made up 57 percent of the death-row population in the South, 57 percent in the Northeast, 53 percent in the North Central region, and 30 percent in the West. In that 5-year interval, blacks constituted roughly 19 percent of the total population in the South, 9 percent in the Northeast, 8 percent in the North Central region, and 5 percent in the West. Within the South, therefore, blacks were *three times more likely* to be found on death row than in the general population. In the three other regions, blacks were *about six times more likely* to be on death row than in the population as a whole. At the national level, they were nearly five times more apt to be on death row than in the total U.S. population.

Black persons: Percent in the general and death-row population, by U.S. region, 1972-76 average



Source: Capital punishment

The following official NPS and NCS reports issued by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration relate to material included in this publication. Single copies are available at no charge from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, Md. 20850. Multiple copies are for sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

National Prisoner Statistics

Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities — Advance Report. Special Report No. SD-NPS-SR-2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1976.

Based on a nationwide survey of some 10,000 inmates conducted during January-February 1974 and in conjunction with the Census of State Correctional Facilities, this overview covers the following subject matter areas: demographic and socioeconomic characteristics; use of alcohol and drugs; offense, adjudication, and sentence; prison routine; and correctional background. The analysis is drawn from 19 data tables. The sample design and size, estimation procedure, and reliability of estimates are discussed; standard error tables and instructions for gauging sampling variability also are included.

Detailed reports covering several of the subjects of this advance report are in preparation.

Bibliography

Capital Punishment, 1976. Bulletin SD-NPS-CP-5. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1977.

Most recent in a series of reports based on data from a voluntary reporting system instituted in 1926. Twenty-two data tables (most of them cross-tabulations) present information on the inmates' sex, race, age, marital status, educational attainment, offense for which imprisoned, legal status at time of arrest, date of first sentence for capital offense, legal status as of December 31, 1976, and jurisdiction where held. A mail canvass was used to gather this information from the Federal Bureau of Prisons and from correctional authorities in the 50 States and the District of Columbia; the final completion rate was 100 percent for all jurisdictions. Five additional tables give historical trends on executions since 1930, and the status of death penalty statutes throughout the United States is summarized in a final table.

National Crime Survey

Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1975. No. SD-NCS-N-7. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 1977.

Interviews with about 136,000 occupants of some 60,000 housing units and with 14,400 businesses yielded the data in this report, third in a series of annual releases of a comprehensive set of NCS results.

There are 104 data tables, the largest group of which display victimization rates — the basic measures of the occurrence of NCS.

measured crimes among population groups distinguished on the basis of conventional demographic and socioeconomic variables. Data on victim-offender relationships, offender characteristics, crime incident characteristics, and reporting to the police are also given. Selected findings are summarized. Methodological and other technical information, including a questionnaire facsimile and standard error tables, are appended to assist persons wishing further to interpret the data.

Criminal Victimization in the United States — A Comparison of 1975 and 1976 Findings. No. SD-NCS-N-8. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1977.

Based chiefly on victimization rates, this is the third report assessing year-to-year changes in the occurrence of crimes measured by the NCS. Two subjects of special interest — weapons use and reporting to the police — are also examined. Information from 23 detailed tables is summarized in a dozen charts. Two technical appendixes give information on the sample, reliability of estimates, and standard error calculations.

Houston: Public Attitudes About Crime. No. SD-NCS-C-23. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1978.

The first in a series of reports presenting the results of attitudinal surveys taken in 13 large central cities early in 1974. Four general topics are addressed: crime trends, fear of crime, residential problems

Bibliography

and lifestyles, and local police performance. City-wide estimates were developed from interviews with the occupants of 4,866 housing units (9,357 Houston residents age 16 and over). Data from 37 tables are summarized on four charts. Comparable reports will be issued during 1978 for the companion surveys, which were conducted in Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Oakland, Pittsburgh, San Diego, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Each will carry a copy of the questionnaire, a statement of methodology, and standard error tables. As in all NCS reports, there will also be a glossary.